Essays

An essay is a relatively short literary composition in prose in which the writer discusses a topic or tries to persuade the reader to accept a point of view.

The main idea which the writer explores or tests or tries to persuade the reader to accept is called the thesis. One way of understanding an essay is to see it as a thesis plus supporting evidence.

- Some Equations
- Essay Structures
  - Five Paragraph Theme Structure
  - Simple Argument Structure
  - Proposal Structure, based on Jonathan Swift’s “A Modest Proposal”
  - Latin Rhetoricians’ Division of a Discourse
- See Also

Some Equations

In writing courses, clear distinctions are made between different kinds of writing. Sometimes confusion arises if everyone isn't sharing the same meanings of such terms as "essay," "story," and "report." Here are some definitions of the terms in equation form, with the courses teaching each kind of writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Writing</th>
<th>Courses Focused on the Type of Writing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essay = opinion + evidence</td>
<td>WR 115, 121, 122, 123, 222 Composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story = characters + action + dialogue + scene</td>
<td>WR 241, 244 Creative Writing---Fiction Nonfiction</td>
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<td>WR 240, 248 Creative Writing---Nonfiction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Report = fact + fact + fact + fact</td>
<td>WR 227 Technical Writing</td>
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Essay Structures

One of the reasons why essays are so frequently assigned and written is that the form can be modified to fit many subjects and purposes. Yet there are a few basic underlying structures typical to the essay form. Here are some.

Five Paragraph Theme Structure

1. Introduction, ending in thesis
2. First Body Paragraph: one kind of evidence, example, or point in support of thesis
3. Second Body Paragraph: Another kind of evidence, example, or point in support of thesis
4. Third Body Paragraph: Another kind of evidence, examples, or point in support of thesis
5. Conclusion, beginning with restatement of thesis

Simple Argument Structure

1. Intro, beginning with context ("They say"); and ending in thesis ("I say")
2. Background, Definitions
3. Con points, reasons against the thesis (accurately and fairly presented, but not developed; rebutted, or conceded, or dismissed): “They say,” “hayslayers”
4. Pro point #1 supporting thesis, and developed with examples, sources, etc.
5. Pro point #2
6. Pro point #3
7. Pro point #4, etc.
8. Conclusion, beginning with restatement of thesis

Proposal Structure, based on Jonathan Swift’s “A Modest Proposal”
| 1 | Problem (Background, “They say”) |
| 2 | Advantages of proposal |
| 3 | Proposal (Answer to a question of policy): “I say” |
| 4 | Explanation of proposal |
| 5 | Advantages explained:  
# 1
# 2  
# 3  
# 4, etc. |
| 6 | Objections to proposal (“naysayers”) |
| 7 | Restatement of advantages |
| 8 | Disclaimer |

**Latin Rhetoricians’ Division of a Discourse**

| 1 | Exordium | Intro |
| 2 | Narratio | Exposition of case |
| 3 | Divisio | Outline of points or steps |
| 4 | Confirmatio | Proof |
| 5 | Confutatio | Refutation of opposition |
| 6 | Peroratio | Conclusion |

**See Also**

- Parts of an Essay (Introduction, Body, Conclusion)
- Paragraphs
- Subject or Topic
- Titles
- Audience
- Community of Discourse
- Rhetoric
- Rhetorical Modes